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THE PAPAGO CEREMONY OF VÍKĬTA

BY

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INTRODUCTION

114 THIS account of the fiesta of Víkĭta is based on personal observations among the Papago of Sonora, Mexico, in the summer of 1920. The legend of "Montezuma" was related by Kiâ'hâd (Rainbow), a Papago living three miles north of the international boundary, and was interpreted by Joseph Menager.

The "Montezuma" herein referred to must not be confounded with the personage of the same name so prominent in the annals of Mexico at the time of the conquest, but, like other sedentary people in our Southwest, the Papago have adopted the name through the Spaniards, and have applied it to one of their culture deities.

EDWARD H. DAVIS.

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THE PAPAGO CEREMONY OF VÍKĬTA

By Edward H. Davis

MANY years ago a great flood visited this country, inundating the whole region except the mountains, to which the people fled for safety. When the water subsided and the land was again dry, a large pool remained near Quitovaquita, Sonora, in which lived a great monster of which the people stood in deadly fear, for he was declared to eat human beings. He had the power to fascinate any man or woman who came in sight, and to draw them irresistibly toward him, then swallowing them alive. If any one had the temerity to peek at him even from the top of the mountain overlooking the pool, the monster instantly drew him down, in spite of his utmost power to resist, and consumed him.

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THE PERMANENT POND AT QUITOVAQUITA, WITH THE HOME OF MANUEL ORTEGA ON THE BANK AND THE LEGENDARY MOUNTAIN AT THE RIGHT

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773 The terrified people tried to discover some means to rid themselves of this monster, who was gradually devouring the inhabitants of the neighboring villages, so they called a great council to plan for the destruction of the terrible menace. Unable to make any plan themselves, they sent a runner to Montezuma (Ehtoy), their great deity or hero, to come to their assistance. He made a sharp knife of obsidian and consented to kill the monster. As he started, he said to his wife: "If I kill, I will send up a white cloud; if not, I will send up a black cloud, and you will know." He climbed to the top of the mountain, and when the monster saw him, he drew him down and swallowed him. Montezuma went up and down, inside the monster, trying to find a way of escape, but without success. He first tried the head, but found no opening; then he tried the fundament, but found it was closed. Several times he traveled up and down the monster, but could find no way of escape. Then he took his knife and began to cut and hack until he had loosened the heart of the monster; then he cut an

THE MOUNTAIN FROM WHICH THE LEGENDARY MONSTER DREW THE PEOPLE TO THEIR DESTRUCTION

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773 opening in the creature's ribs, and escaped, carrying the heart with him. He called in a loud voice to all the villagers, far and near, and when they heard him, he sent up the white cloud of victory.

The monster thrashed and threw his great body around until, in his dying agony, he had splashed all the water out of the pool, since which time there has been no 713 water in that place. Then Montezuma 718 took the heart and cut it in two pieces, paring each of them down until he had made two round objects about the size of a man's fist. He made one to represent a male, and the other a female. He then prepared a great fiesta, and all the people came from far and near to celebrate the death of the monster. Montezuma then instructed the people how to care for the hearts, how to guard them and to make fiestas for them each year. From that time the hearts have been looked upon as saints or idols which can intercede for them with the higher powers. A soft deerskin bag was made and filled with the soft downy feathers of the eagle, and upon these the hearts were laid,

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and the bag closed so that no human eye might thereafter see them. To this day, with possibly one or two exceptions, no person has ever seen the hearts. The bag was kept in a Papago medicine basket, made of palmetto fiber, which in turn, together with all the wrappings and ceremonial paraphernalia, was placed in two large ollas, then sealed up and hidden in a secret cave in the mountains. Many years ago an Indian with an evil mind broke in and stole the male heart, so that only the female heart remains.

[115]

Manuel Ortega, an old Papago Indian, with whom the writer stayed, said that at one time he happened to be near when the keeper of the heart was rearranging or changing the eagle-feathers used as a bed for the heart. Becoming entangled in the feathers, the keeper pulled the heart out of the bag, and it fell to the ground. Ortega saw the heart before the keeper could return it to the bag, and as nearly as he could remember, it appeared to be a round, greenish stone about as large as a baseball. The Indians say they have sometimes heard the

THE PLAIN OF LIMY SOIL, THE ANCIENT HOME OF THE MONSTER

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773 voice of the male heart calling from the
778 hills at night, and whenever they have tried to follow, it has always eluded them.
796 Each year, at full moon, in the month of July, the basket, with all the ceremonial trappings, is brought forth by the keeper, who is an old Papago woman, sister of the man who has charge of it, and she watches over it during the whole ceremony. At the conclusion, the man in charge opens the basket, inserts one hand in the bag, putting the other hand over the opening to prevent his seeing the heart, turns it over, then withdraws his hand and closes the opening, replacing the bag in the basket, which he lashes down with deerskin thongs. When the keeper grows old and realizes that he is about to die, he appoints a successor.

796 The people for many miles around make
788 an annual pilgrimage to the village of
[804] Quitovaquita, situated twenty-five miles south of the boundary line, in Sonora, to pay honor to the sacred relic, and to pray for belessings which it grants, such as plenty of rain, good crops, health, and long life for each family. Any neglect of this pil-

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grimage and ceremony may entail floods, drought, sickness, even death. To avoid these the people travel many miles, with teams or on horseback, under a blazing sun or in rainstorms, to participate in the ceremony. The place where the monster lived covers an area of two or three hundred acres of whitish earth or calcareous material, which the Indians claim to be the remains of the flesh of the monster. Below the surface are massses of immense bones. Quitovaquita is surrounded by tropical desert vegetation of palo verde, mesquite, palo fierro, giant or saguaro cactus, pitahaya or organ cactus, and other desert growth. It consists of twenty or thirty one-story houses, built of adobe or of stone imbedded in mud.

In the center of the village is a *charco*, or large pool, which is fed by a number of springs and furnishes water for the village, and drinking and wading places for burros, horses, and cattle. When the pool is filled, the water is used to irrigate the gardens of the villages. During the period of the fiesta the village is thronged with visiting Indians, and those who cannot find accommoda-

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MANUEL ORTEGA, CAPITAN AT QUITOVAQUITA

THE HOME OF MANUEL ORTEGA

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[Facing p.164(B)]

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312 796 [124] tion in the houses, camp near the pool. The writer was fortunate in having the opportunity of visiting Quitovaquita during a fiesta, as the guest of Joseph Menager, who has a ranch near the border, and who speaks fluently both the Spanish and Papago languages.

796 We reached the village at 8 o'clock in the morning, and stopped at the house of the chief, whose Spanish name is Manuel Ortega. We went a half mile into the desert to the grounds where the ceremony was to be held, and met a number of the men who were to participate. Hanging on a small shelter were the ceremonial trappings that later were to be used during the fiesta. They consisted of deerskin masks that fitted over the head, the fronts of which were pierced by two holes for the eyes, and from the lower edges hung long fringes. Sashes of bright-colored fabric, necklaces composed mostly of blue-glass beads interspersed with short lengths of shell beads, bunches of eagle-feathers, robes, anklets girdled with cocoons filled with fine sand, and girdles of deerskin, suspended from

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[293] which were several bells and sea-shells strung on deerskin thongs.

In the afternoon of August 4, Manuel Ortega, aided by all the other house-owners, made four small piles of sand in front of his house, and later two men, wearing deer-skin masks with feathers, and girdles with jingling shells and bells, came to the house, headed by a leader and followed by a crowd of men and boys. The leader placed pinches of cornmeal on each pile of sand, and a bunch of medicine-feathers on one of the piles. Four times he put the pinches of meal around, and then one of the men shot a small arrow into one of the sand-piles. A
[431] pail of figs was presented to the performers by the house-owner, and in an hour the performance was repeated. This is a kind of blessing, and is said to insure good luck to the household for the ensuing year.

On the night of the fourth everybody
[346] went out to the fiesta grounds, where two booths, made of the wood of the saguaro cactus, semicircular in form and about 100 feet apart, had been built. In each of these, at short intervals, two men having

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KIÂ'HÂD ("RAINBOW"), WHO RELATED THE LEGEND OF THE MONSTER

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796 masks crowned with feathers on their heads and carrying in their hands wands decorated with bunches of eagle-feathers on each end and in the middle, danced all night opposite each other, singing at the same time in a falsetto voice. After dancing for five or ten minutes the men discarded their masks and wands, and rested for a like period.

[537] About midnight, the old man who had entire charge delivered a speech in which he said that "Montezuma" had given this ceremony to the people and desired it to be continued, at the same time urging the young men to learn it, as but few of the old men remained who understood the legend and the ceremony.

796 292 Before sunrise on the morning of the fifth, the people dressed in holiday clothes and went out to the fiesta grounds to witness the opening of the principal day. In the booths preparations were being made behind improvised curtains, and as the sun rose, the principal figures, robed in red blankets with girdles of shells and bells, and wearing masks crowned with eagle-feathers, went forward to the singers' booth, about 300

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feet to the west, accompanied by assistants robed in blankets, cut poncho-style, with bare arms and legs painted white. There were three assistants to each group, and as they advanced they sprinkled libations of cornmeal from small clam-shells that each [293] held in the left hand. The masked men carried wands, about four feet long, decorated with bunches of eagle-plumes fastened to each end and in the middle. Each plume was fastened with sinew to a deerskin thong, and these were tied in bunches. The assistants wore gray blankets and turbans made of red bandanas, and carried shells of cornmeal. The meal which figures in the ceremony is made only from corn that grows in [824] double or twin ears. In the turbans were inserted four eagle-feathers attached to short sticks. Above the feet of each man were fastened deerskin anklets, circled with small rattles of tough cocoons filled with fine sand. As they neared the singers' booths they crossed on each side, then turned and came back to the booth from which they had started, and took off their ceremonial robes. In the singers' 796

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NATIVE WOMEN OF QUITOVAQUITA

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796 In the singer's
534 booth sat four men, facing east, having in front of them large, bowl-shaped, coiled baskets, inverted. On the bottoms of the baskets rested the ends of a notched stick made of creosote wood, the other end being held in the left hand of the singer. In the right hand of each singer was held the half of a lower jaw of a peccary, a deer's shoulder-blade, and the shin-bones of a deer with the hoofs on. With these bones the singers rubbed the notched sticks up and down, producing thereby a hollow sound to the rhythm of the singing.

796 Immediately behind the singers sat an
778 old Indian woman, her head wrapped in a
533 red bandana, as the guardian of the basket containing the heart. The basket was 4½ ft. long, 1½ ft. wide, and 1 ft. deep, and was placed on a low platform behind her, and level with her shoulders. The series of songs or cantos dealt with the sun, moon, stars, the earth, creation, and the culture-hero "Montezuma." As the singers chant, the older Indians think they can hear a woman's voice, and say, "The heart is call-
796 ing for its mate." The three priests from

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796 each booth must neither eat nor drink from sunrise to sunset, during the time of the ceremony, nor relieve themselves during that period. Four times, at noon, dry pinole and water are held under their noses, but they must not touch either of them.

[785] The four singers and the woman guardian may have water, but no food; neither may they leave their posts to relieve bodily discomforts, from sunrise to sunset.

Any of the men or boys may don the ceremonial costumes and march, two at a time, to the spot near the singers' booths, where they dance and sing twice, and then, returning, sing once while in the booth, and once before retiring from it, making four times in all, for four is the ceremonial number of

[801] the Papago. Anything done once must be repeated four times before it is completed.

The two men in costumes and masks always sang and stamped opposite each other, and made the same motions with the ceremonial eagle-wands. Each party took about ten or twelve minutes from the time the assistants fastened on the ceremonial costumes until they were removed. Usually

(Left) THE CEREMONIAL BOOTH. (Right) THE LEADER PLACING SACRED MEAL ON THE SAND PILE
Note the medicine-feathers on one of the distant piles. (Photograph by Joseph Menager)

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THE MASKED PERFORMERS DANCING

(Photograph by Joseph Menager)

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796 an old man and a novice went in together, the older man taking the lead in singing and stamping. Some extended the arms straight out with wands held vertically in the middle, which they raised and lowered rhythmically; others held them horizontally with both hands, raising and lowering them like dumbbells; some held them horizontally at their sides, working them up and down over the shoulders; others held them by the ends, swinging them from side to side.

After the first song, the leading priest started out of the booth to the left, and, as he went, sprinkled some of the sacred meal. Next came the leading dancer, then his companion, then the other two priests, who also scattered meal. They then proceeded in single-file to the spot near the singers' booth, where they danced. The head-priest punched a hole in the ground with his toe, and with a ceremonial swing of the arm dropped some meal. The head-dancer stepped on this meal. Then the priest advanced, punched another hole opposite the north, in which he sprinkled some sacred meal, and then the head-dancer stepped on this,

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796 while the second dancer stepped on the first-placed meal. Next the head-priest punched a hole at the south and dropped a pinch of meal, and the first dancer hopped on this while his companion stepped on the meal opposite, to the north. In these positions they danced, and if they did not quite step on the meal, the priests guided them. After a few minutes the leader again shifted the dancers, and they went through the same motions. When the dance was finished they marched in the same rotation back to their booth, the leading priest sprinkling meal as he turned the corner to enter. The two priests bringing up the rear also sprinkled meal as they turned into the booth. When inside the booth the masked men danced again and then disrobed.

About mid-afternoon two clowns entered, one from each booth, each wearing a deerskin mask and a ragged strip of deerskin over the shoulder, and carrying a new bow and arrow. They went around the fiesta grounds as if hunting, and in pantomime they found tracks, followed them up, and stole upon the game; then one of them shot

PRIESTS WITH THEIR FEATHERED WANDS
(Photograph by Joseph Menager)

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PL. XI

THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE CEREMONY AND THE FOUR SINGERS IN THE BOOTH

(Photograph by Joseph Menager)

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1796 an arrow at it. The other went through the motions of killing the game by smashing the skull, and threw it over his shoulder. Then they went in search of more tracks, and in turn killed jackrabbits, deer, antelope, and other game, one at a time.

When the banner was paraded, one man carried a bush from which the clowns appeared to pick things. These represented [222] large, fat, yellow worms, which in the spring are sometimes found on bushes and are eaten by the Indians. The clowns gathered these in pantomime, and then built a fire to roast and eat them. Four times the [789] banner was paraded about the ground. It appeared to be a small square of white sheeting, upon which was painted a crude rainbow, clouds, and rain. Presumably it was intended to bring rain or to prevent [273] drought. Late in the afternoon many of the Indians, drunk from tizwin, staggered about the ground.

At sunset the last of the ceremony took place. The priests led the masked dancers in front of the singers' booth, and there the four masked men danced and sang; then all

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796 returned to their respective booths, while the people crowded in and the priests sprinkled meal, blessed all those in the booths, and the fiesta was finished, except the grand debauch.

The singers left the booths, and the old woman picked up the basket containing the sacred relic, balanced it on her head, and later laid it on the roof of a ramada, near the house where the tizwin was deposited. The ceremonial articles were tied up in a large bundle, carried to the same place, and deposited near by. Here they were under constant observation, and were perfectly safe. The second day later they were to be placed in their secret cave and sealed.

796 273 786 The night following the ceremony was given over entirely to unrestricted drinking, indulged in by the entire male population. A peculiar custom is that some of the young men, still able to walk, went [201] around to every Indian house and touched every man on the shoulder with a stick of saguaro wood—a summons to go to the tizwin house and get drunk. This could not be disregarded. The summons was

SINGING AND DANCING BEFORE THE SINGERS' BOOTH

One of the ceremonial booths of cactus ribs may be seen in the distance. (Photograph by Joseph Menager)

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796 always accompanied with the ceremonial
273 phrase, "You are a good man when you are
786 drunk." Any man so summoned arose immediately, found his way to the place of debauchery, and drank. Often the men would vomit, then proceed to drink again, and this might happen several times during the night. All drank, both men and boys, until there was not a sober one in the village.

273 Tizwin is the juice of the fruit of the
796 saguaro cactus, gathered in July, and is boiled down to a syrup, then sealed up in small ollas. A cloth is placed over the top, tied down, and then plastered over with mud, which is allowed to dry. Three days before the fiesta is to end, the syrup is placed in a number of large ollas, set in the earth in a special house. Water is then poured into the ollas until they are nearly full, and a slow fire of mesquite sticks is built in the center of the house. The keeper, an old, dried-up Indian, then closes the door, leaving the liquid to ferment. The smouldering fire is kept alive for three days and nights, and when the ceremony is

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over the liquor is ready to drink. If it is not consumed when fully ripe, it becomes water and loses its intoxicating qualities. In color it is blood-red and tastes like sour wine. There were nine large ollas in this house, containing twelve to fourteen gallons each, so that in all, about 120 gallons must have been consumed.

The old keeper doled the liquor in small, two-quart ollas, from which the Indians drank, passing them from mouth to mouth until all was consumed, and the ollas ready to be refilled. The Indians claim that the liquor is good for them, as it cleanses the system either as an emetic or as a cathartic. It was given to them by "Montezuma," together with the saguaro and other desert products. During the drinking there was neither quarreling nor fighting.

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Within a quarter of a mile of Quitovaquita, at the place where the monster is said to have perished, there appears to be a great deposit of lime-like earth, and in some places limestone. This doubtless hides the skeletal remains of many large prehistoric animals, since we there found

MASKED CLOWNS SHOOTING THE ARROWS AT IMAGINARY GAME
(Photograph by Joseph Menager)

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135 evidences of bones and teeth. We took up some great molars that must have come from a great vegetable eating animal, like a mammoth or a mastodon. These were excavated near the surface, where they had been exposed to the weather, for they disintegrated when exposed. In digging a well in this region the Indians told us that great bones were found, as deep as they went. This deposit of bones, no doubt, inspired the legend of "Montezuma" and the monster.

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PL. XIV

PARADING THE BANNER
(Photograph by Joseph Menager)

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